Co-operation Centre for Afghanistan (CCA)
Department of Human Rights

Ethnic cleansing in Mazar: eye witnesses stories

September 1998

INTRODUCTION:

As the civil war continues and the use of force is preferred to national reconciliation, Afghanistan bleeds and more tragedies are taken place.

In less than a month since they pushed back General Dustom forces from the frontlines across Badghis & Faryab border, the Taliban could march from Faryab to Taloqan and dramatically defeat their rivals. Unfortunately, while entering the cities and villages they committed the same crimes as they and their rivals did last year in Mazar and Shiberghan.

According to the confirmed reports all inhabitants of the north were harassed one way or another, but the Taliban particularly targeted Hazaras. In Maymana where first fall to the Taliban, thousands of young and elder men were detained and beaten and many killed after being alleged to have hidden their weapons. In Pulikhomri the Taliban belonging to Bashir Commander looted the city and took people's properties with them to Baghlan.

Unfortunate people of Mazar-i-Sharif faced with rather a bitter fate. Once again a human tragedy engulfed Mazar city as a well-planned genocide operation carried out by the Taliban. During the firs three of the Taliban presence in the city they shot at anybody seen in the streets. As soon as they could suppress the remaining resistance in the suburbs of the city a house to house search was launched during which tens of thousands of people particularly Hazaras including women and children, who were caught in trap, were immediately killed or detained. Sayed Abad, Elm Arab, Ali Chapan, and Zera'at were particularly targeted.

It happened that the survivors of a family could not take the dead bodies of their families to the cemetery and had to bury them inside their houses.. Detained people were kept in Mazar Central Prison, Malik house and Qala-e-Zaini. Each night a group of prisoners were taken to Hairatan or Dashti Laili for execution. Hundreds of people were also killed around Mazari grave.

Mulla Abdul Manan Naizi was quoted as saying that Hazara should either to convert from Shai sect into Sunni or leave the country. Nevertheless, the Taliban closed all windows in an attempt to prevent the news of their crimes to reach outside world.

Nobody other than Taliban was allowed to leave or enter Mazar. ICRC was directed not to take journalists or NGO members. Its members were not allowed to make contact with people in Mazar.

CCA while expressing its concern over the mass killing of civilians in Mazar and other parts of the north asks the international community not to wait and watch how innocent people are slaughtered in Afghanistan. We call upon the UN, particularly, the Security Council of the UN to send a fact finding mission to Afghanistan to investigate the committed crimes and punish the perpetrators.

WHAT WITNESSES SAY:

1. *Mahboba a 25-year-old girl and a student of university in Balkh University, who lived in Sayed Abad, Mazar-i-Sharif has come from Mazar in September 9th in Peshawar says:*

It was a normal day that day. Everybody was busy in his/her business. I like others went to university to attend my classes. That day we had a test and the student were busy in taking the test. Suddenly I heard the sound of some rocket blasting. All escaped from the university. After that sound of rocket blasts, we heard the firing of lights weapon such as Kalashitove etc...

No one knew what had happened at that moment. Some thought that might be there is again fighting between Shir Arab a commander belonging to Junbish-e-Mili Islami of Rashid Dustom and Shura Nazar of Commander Masood.

But it was not a face to face fighting as it used to be happened before. There was firing from one side – the Rouza-e-Mubarak. In the area close to Interior Ministry, a number of arm fighters and civilians were killed. Then all were escaping from the main roads to the small streets to save their lives. Still people were asking each other what is happening.

Once some pick-ups entered the city with white flags on them. Still people were confused if Taliban had come into the city. The firing continued from 10 to 12 am in 8 August 1998.

Witnesses from Rouza-e-Mubarak said while Taliban entered the city they set Pickas at both sides of streets and started to fire directly on people. These people lost their lives while they were escaping the incident.

The most targeted areas were Zera'at, Sayed Abad, Ali Chopan, and Alam Arab. However, the other areas of the city were also targeted.

Civilians' death bodies ordered to be left in the spot for three day as Taliban revenge when last year Taliban's death bodies were remained unburied in the streets for many days. During these three days, dogs in the streets ate the death bodies. The Taliban, after three days, ordered the relatives of the victims to go in the streets, search, find, and bury the death bodies.

Among these people I knew a boy whose name was Ehsanullah and was a 12-years-old boy. He was the only breadwinner of the family. His mother used to bake the bread and he was selling them in the streets.

Karta Shafa Khana, Zera'at, and Hazara inhabitants areas had the largest victim number. Other areas, however, were searched and then the men were detained. They took the prisoners to Mazar Central Prison, Qala-e-Zaini, Balkh, and Shiberghan. Some have been taken to Kandahar.

Before the fall of Mazar to the Taliban, about 3000 fresh fighter troops were sent by Hezb-i-Wahdat from Bamyan to defend Taliban offensive into Mazar. They did not do that, as the Northern Alliance forces were disorganised. Therefore, they did not succeed to use the newly arrived potential from Bamyan.

All who manage to survive are hidden in their houses. Now it was one o'clock and there was a death like silence in the city. Shortly after a while, a home to home search began. My sister Shafiqa and I saw that the Taliban were searching houses and they took men of Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks to the Central Prison of Mazar. This searching were continued for three days and young men were detained.

One of neighbouring families whom had no relation with any political parties lost the two men and some in-laws with whom they lived together in a house. It was just of being Hazaras. The in-laws Hussain Ali and Yusuf were known later to be taken to Shiberghan and the fate of the two young boys Nabi and Mohammed remained unknown. The neighbouring Pashtoon boys, witnessing of the event, told their mother that your boys have been killed, we saw ourselves. Then the poor mother, disappointedly, went to search for the death bodies of her dear sons. She was looking the streets and streams. When she was searching for her two sons' death bodies, she witnessed a woman who found her son's death body that was torn into pieces by dogs. She was collecting parts of the body into a bag. Nabi's mother wished if she could do so.

People remained locked in their homes. No one could manage to arrange dinner or lunch.

Taliban did not accept food from prisoners' family members nor they provide them with. By the third and fourth day they sort out prisoners by the ethnic identity such as, Pashtoons, Turkmans, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras. Others gradually were released but Hazaras were not.

One of my relatives who later on was released, said: "Taliban placed the prisoners, mostly Hazaras, in three containers to take them to Shiberghan or Kandahar. They died inside the containers as result of hot weather and no holes to reach fresh air inside."

There is a very hot weather in Laili Desert in which normal trips are difficult to cross from. When these containers were crossing the desert all were died except two men. Their death bodies were thrown in the desert.

In "Karta Shafa Khana" Taliban thrown themselves from the walls of the houses to kill the innocent people. They killed 4-5 persons in each of the houses.

After a week I could go to one of my friend's house who was a Tajik family member. They narrated:

"...In our street more than 50 people were killed. A Hazara boy was came down from the wall of the house that has been being chased with a Talib. His name was Nasrat. He looked to be 19 years old. We could manage to hide him. When the Talib came and asked us where the Hazara boy is, we started to speak in Pashto and told him there is no Hazara people here. As the Talib heard us speaking in Pashto, suddenly changed his manner and said, we have come here to defend you Pashtoons. We do not harm you. Do not afraid. He went back..."

They were searching for boys of 14 or above 14 years old to arrest them if they were Hazaras. If they could speak Pashto it was enough to excuse and release them.

2. Shabeer Ahmad s/o Bahadur Khan a 21-year-old boy is a student of Literature Faculty of Balkh University. He is living in Darwaza Shadiyan. He narrates:

Taliban entered Mazar City shortly after two hours resistant by the opposition groups. It was11 o'clock of August 8. At that moment, I was at the south part of Rouza-e-Sharif when Taliban entered the city. They came into the city from two directions; from Balkh District and Dahdadi District.

In the two first hours Taliban killed anybody in the streets. Afterwards, they started to detain people from everywhere. Most of the detainees, later on, were killed collectively.

Taliban treats people with violence. About 12,000 people were arrested and taken to the Mazar Central Prison, two prisons in the Marmol Street and one in the Ustad Ata a commander of Shura-e-Nezar, Headquarter in the west side of Rouza. More than five thousands people have been killed. The victims are mostly Hazaras.

Taliban targeted areas of Sayed Abad, Dasht-e-Shor, Ali Chopan, and Mazari's grave the most.

People belonging to other ethnic group save Hazaras lives especially Pashtoons.

Among the victims there were a number of children.

While Hazaras were hiding their family's member death bodies were remained unburied in the streets for two to three days. Dogs ate most of death bodies.

Mulla Abdul Manan Naizi, Governor of Mazar in his speeches, asks Hazaras, either change their religious from Shia to Sunni or to leave Afghanistan for graveyard (Iran).

After many days people could come in and go out of the city, if still they were not Hazaras.

Prisons were full of prisoners. The detainees were pressed in the rooms and yards. There were no food and water. Fire fighter trucks were set to pump water from outside the prisons, as there was no space inside. Poor prisoners could not drink enough water to cut down their thirst instead they kept their handkerchiefs under the shower of the trucks pumped water to become juicy and then to press the water into their mouths with their eyes to sky.

3. Mohammed Kabir a 17-year-old boy, student of grade 10 of one of the schools in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan lived in areas around Raouza-e-Sharif. He has recently come from Mazar-i-Sharif and says:

Before the Taliban captured Mazar, it was under the control of northern alliance forces. Taliban captured Mazar in August 8. It was 10:25 am. They fired on people in the street when they first entered the city. All died who could not manage to escape. The firing continued for two hours. Afterwards, the Taliban started to enter people's houses and killed male members of the families. They did not rape. They killed and arrest people in the first day. For the next days they only killed Hazaras. They killed people with torture.

It was the third day of the Taliban control in the city that they enter our house. They hit me. They fired on me, but God blessed, it did not touch me. They repeatedly asked us to give guns and weapons you

have hidden, although I told them we do not have any. They looted our property. They took our car, cash, tape recorders... they stayed in our house for three hours, searching all things. They did not find anything, but they asked me to go with them. My uncle's wife and other females started to cry loudly and request them to leave the boy. The commander an 18 or 19-year-old young boy was very bloodthirsty one. He was always saying that: I am killing you. You Hazara killed 10,000 Talibs last year. That day they let me stay home. When they went I escaped and stayed in another place for twenty days.

The Taliban killed about 20,000 innocent civilians and 5000 military gunmen. The streets were full of dead bodies. Mothers were searching for their son and husband's death bodies in the streets and streams.

Taliban detained most of my friends. Some of them, who released, said that Taliban took the prisoners to Kandahar in the containers. First they kept the prisoners in Mazar Prison, then to Shiberghan, then to Maimana, as there were no enough room for such a large number of prisoners.

Taliban, mostly, targeted Sayed Abad, Kart-e-Shafa Khana, Zera'at, Almmurad, Ali Chopan, and Mazari's grave. They killed people even by firing from helicopters from the air. I know my neighbours who have been killed by Taliban. They also killed Iranian Diplomats in the Iranian Consulate in Madan Namak, Mazar-e-Sharif. The Taliban authorities in Mazar directly threat Hazara ethnic groups as Mulla Abdul Manan Niazi, the governor of the Mazar City in his speeches was encouraging so.

4. Mr. Namatullah s/o Mohammed Yunus a 22-year-old by from Sayed Abad of Mazar-i-Sharif has recently came from Mazar-i-Sharif and says:

I left Mazar in 26 August, 1998. I lost my two young brothers. One was 12 and other was 19 years old. They were killed just for their ethnic identity. It was midnight, 12:30 am, when they knocked the door. Two pick-ups with 12 Taliban fighters asked my younger brother – Hashamatullah, where are you from and to which ethnic group you belong? My brother said the truth, "we are from Kabul and we are Hazaras." Then they entered our house and started to search. They took my brothers outside the house. Firing sound was heard. When my mother looked outside they had been already killed. I was not at home. I was in one of my Pashtoon friend's house. They told me the story. I buried my brothers but with the help of my Pashtoon friends.

My appearance is not like Hazaras, although I am. That was why I could managed to go to Kunduz from the house of my Pashtoon friend, then to Pakistan. My family is still in Mazar but they change the house after my brothers were killed.

Everyday 75 to 90 Hazaras were slaughtered on Mazari's grave. At nights Taliban were entering in Hazaras houses and killing men, or taking them to Laili Desert for mass killing.

5. *Mr. Mohammed Naseer a student of his last semester of Medical Faculty of Balkh University of Mazar-i-Sharif left Mazar for Peshawar in 10 September 1998. He narrates the live condition of people in Mazar after Taliban Forces captured the city in August 8.*

Taliban treat people according to their ethnic identity. They treat with violence with Hazaras while with others they were a little bit smooth. I twice arrested by Taliban. In the first time I was released with the help of my director who was a private hospital director in which I was employed. In the second time they released me when I show the ID card of that hospital.

Taliban arrested my two cosines Mr. Nabi and Mr. Iqbal. Their families had contact with them till ten days. Afterwards, they went unknown. Mr. Nabi was disabled from his two legs.

The prisons had very bad and severe conditions. The prisoners received no food or drinking water. The Central Prison of Mazar was emptied many times. People say most of them were killed in Laili Desert. Some who have seen the desert say, "there are hills of death bodies in the desert."

The Taliban ordered all people in Mazar to practice the Sunni style Islam in their daily life. People should attend the five times prayers in the nearest Mosques. Taliban washed all carpets, cushions, mattresses and etc. of the Shia Moslem Mosques in order to make them clean in an Islamic way. They also washed the wall of these Mosques. Then the prayers perform in a Sunni style Islam.

PARTS OF
MULLA ABDUL MANAN NAIZI, GOVERNOR OF MAZAR CITY
SPEECH:

"...Do you know last year you fired us from every house? You killed 10,000 Talibs, those who memorised Koranic verses in their chests. Pashtoons, Tajiks, Turkmans, and Uzbeks are brothers. Turkmans are good people; they have never fired on us.

Hazaras should study their hundred years ago history. What you become? If you won't be honest, all of you will be killed. Where do you escape? If you go to Bamyan, it is in our control. Everywhere in Afghanistan you go, will be our territory. I am clearly saying that if you are not hand over and not show your honesty, either you will be killed or thrown out of the country or you like Hindus should pay us. If even one fire come from your side, we will put on fire the entire area.

If you want to live along with other Afghan ethnic groups, you should never think of sharing and participating in the future government structure

Hazaras! Where are you escaping? If you jump into the air we will grasp your legs, if you enter the earth we will grasp your ears. Hazaras are not Moslems. You can kill them. It's not a sin. Oh Hazaras become Moslems and pray God as us. We won't let you to go away. Every border is in our control. 10,000 Talibs came last year as guest but you killed them. We will kill you the same way you killed them. They must remain unburied on streets for three days. We kill you and nobody is allowed to bury the death bodies till three days..."

On women issues the Governor says:

"...We actually do not need women works. What positive roles can they play in the society? What is the impact of their roles? We do not need women. They should stay into their houses. Those who send their daughters to the university can say me who ensure that these girls have no illegal relation with boys. Hazrat Ali the Fourth Leader of Moslem Umma after the Prophet Mohammed, himself said, (I would not control myself with a stranger women, even for half an hour). Then how can we do so..."